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JAPANESE COSTUME

under the

TOKUGAWA SHOGUNS

A premiere exhibition of Japanese women's robes and accessories from the 17th to 19th centuries, lent by Mr. Shizuo Nomura, of Tokyo and New York.

Held under the distinguished patronage of HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. KOTO MATSUDAIRA, Japanese Ambassador to Canada

October 16 to December 16, 1956

Royal Ontario Museum
100 Queen's Park
TORONTO CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

The eighty robes in this exhibition date from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. During this time Japan had deliberately closed her borders to foreign trade and influence, and she remained secluded in a feudal society until in 1854 the American warships of Admiral Perry persuaded her to lower her barriers and admit a modern world. These peaceful centuries saw a rise in the prosperity and power of the middle class—the townspeople who were businessmen and merchants. To suit their livelier mood the theatre produced the boisterous plays known as Kabuki; artists designed and sold to eager admirers reams of picture prints of actors and gay ladies; and the Yoshiwara, Edo's courtesan quarter, lured the pleasure-loving with the beautiful women who lived there. The scene in Edo (the old name for Tokyo) at this time must have been very like that in Paris at the time of Toulouse-Lautrec—resounding with night life and the pursuit of pleasure.

The costume of the period reflects strongly the preferences of this well-to-do middle class of Edo. These people liked colour and gaiety and show, and they could afford to spend well on things that attracted them, but their demands for luxuries endangered Japan's economic structure. To limit their extravagance the authorities occasionally published sumptuary laws which restricted some of the processes and material used in the making of kimono. As a result new and ingenious methods of decoration were developed

which made less free use of imported silk, gold and silver, and costly weaving techniques. The ingenuity of the artists working under these restrictions produced some of the finest robes in the exhibition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

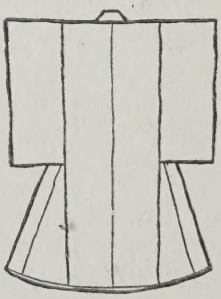
The Royal Ontario Museum wishes to thank the many who assisted in the production of this exhibition, and, in particular, Mr. Shizuo Nomura of Tokyo and New York; His Excellency, Dr. Koto Matsudaira, Japanese Ambassador to Canada; Consulate of Japan, Toronto; Miss Pauline Simmons, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Mr. Douglas W. Overton, executive director, Japan Society Incorporated, New York; Japan Trade Centre, Toronto; the Japanese-Canadian community of Toronto, and those who have lent accessories for inclusion in the exhibition.

THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD

The Tokugawa period, 1603–1867, is that to which all the robes in this exhibition belong. It is a period of great importance in the history of Japanese costume. Japan's self-inflicted policy of isolation from the rest of the world cut her off from her greatest source of cultural and artistic supply—China. Turning to her own artists and craftsmen she developed during this period much of the artistic genius which we today associate with Japan.

No longer able to import rich silks from China, she developed her own silk weaving industry. As brocaded silks were costly, other dyeing and printing processes were perfected as decorative media for robes. Women's costume, formerly influenced by Chinese fashions, also acquired a character of its own and in its decoration we find one of the most vigorous expressions of Japanese creative art.

FURISODE



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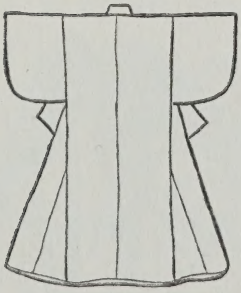
THE KIMONO

The Kimono is the most important article of Japanese women's clothing. It is of ancient origin, but reached its present form in the 17th century during the Tokugawa period. It is a straight cut garment composed of four narrow lengths of silk. The hem is padded with heavy wadding to make it flare on the ground. There are two styles; those with long sleeves called furisode, and those with short sleeves called kosode. The long sleeved robes are worn by young unmarried girls.

It will be noticed that each beautiful asymmetrical design is a work of art composed to fill the robe's shape harmoniously. Japanese artists, especially those who designed prints, created designs for robes, and their prints—besides being "Pictures of the Floating World"—also depicted the latest fashions of the day.

KOSODE



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TEXTILE TECHNIQUES

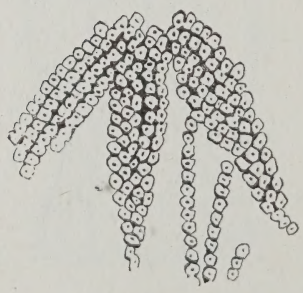
A variety of textile techniques were used in the execution of Kimono designs and Japanese artists were masters at blending these techniques.

The silk from which the robes were made was usually of a damask weave called rinzu, patterned with small repeated diaper and floral motifs. To this the other techniques were applied.

Two tie-dyeing techniques were used. The most exacting of these was kanoko. In it certain portions of the silk were tightly tied over tiny silver nails. The silk was then dipped in dye. When dyeing was completed the ties and nails were removed, leaving a puckered area of dots and circles, most graphically called "fish-egg" or "dye-painting" patterns. Many robes in the exhibition are patterned with this technique. As it was a slow and laborious process it was costly to produce. At the end of the 17th century the use of wood-blocks or stencils was introduced to produce a similar effect more cheaply.

The other tie-dyeing technique—boshi-shibori

KANOKO



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—was used for larger areas of silk to be tied and protected from the dye. Flower and leaf shapes were carefully gathered and tied and probably protected with a covering.

Resist dyeing, in which the areas to be protected from the dye are covered with a dye-repellant substance such as wax, was not used until late in the 17th century, when a rice-paste was perfected which was efficient as a resist on silk. It is used on several robes of the late 17th and 18th centuries.

The jewel-like colouring and the blending of the above techniques into a harmonious whole was done with embroidery. The most generally used stitches were satin stitch and couching. Split stitch occurs occasionally, and stem stitch was used for fine lines. Satin stitch is ideal for silk. The long stitches lying on the surface are picked up by the light, and the silk shines and glows brilliantly. Likewise, couching is the most flattering stitch for gold thread. It is laid on the fabric and stitched down at intervals with a very fine silk thread. Many robes are richly embroidered.

SATIN STITCH

CUT 1463

THE OBI

The sash worn with the Kimono is called an obi. For centuries it was narrow and twisted around the waist, the ends crossed and turned under. It was not until the Tokugawa period that the wide obi was introduced. In its present form it is about eleven feet long and two feet wide, folded double and tied with one of a variety of intricate bows or knots at the back. Up until the 18th century it was usually tied in front.

A glance around the exhibition will show that it is in the obi we find the most elaborate decoration. Most of it is worked in multicoloured embroidery. Brocaded silks, rich with gold thread, were also used for obi material. Brocades had become so costly in the 17th century that finally about 1680 their use was limited to priests' and actors' robes and obi material.

This exhibition was produced under the direction of Dr. A. D. Tushingham, Head of the Division of Art and Archaeology, Mrs. Gerard Brett, curator, Department of Textiles, and Mrs. Douglas Stephen, assistant to the curator, Far Eastern Department.

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